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SUBJECT: VOTING GOES SMOOTHLY IN MONGOLIAQS
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: (A) ULAANBAATAR 320
(B) WIEGAND-SES-O-WATCHTEAM EMAILS 29June2008

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Voting in Mongolia's Parliamentary elections went smoothly and ended on schedule at 10 pm on Sunday, June 29; election authorities then started the lengthy process of vote-counting. Preliminary returns were not expected to be available until well into June 30, at the earliest. Initial statistics on voter turnout, provided by the General Election Commission, suggested heavy turnout (estimated in the 70-80% range). According to information from Embassy Ulaanbaatar's 23 credentialed election observers (deployed within the capital and to the provinces of Khovd, Bulgan, Orkhon, Arhangai and Tov), voting in most areas went without a hitch, and the media noted the Ambassador's visits to several polling stations. Except for one minor scuffle, there were no reports of election-related violence. At a vast majority of polling stations, processing was orderly, transparent and in accordance with Mongolia's Election Law. Observers said the rights of partisan election monitors were respected, and that election facilities and arrangements were generally good and election officials were cooperative, flexible and effective. There were several allegations of vote-buying, but no concrete evidence to support these allegations has emerged. In at least two locations, government officials were accused of distributing new national ID cards on election day. The vote-counting could take as much as a few days, and runoffs could complicate the process. While it is too early to label Sunday's election an unqualified success, Mongolians exercised their right to vote, reinforcing their emerging transformation to democracy. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) At 10 pm on Sunday, June 29, voting in Mongolia's Parliamentary elections ended as scheduled and election authorities started the lengthy process of vote-counting. Limited preliminary returns may emerge late in the day on June 30. Initial statistics on voter turnout, provided in the middle of Election Day by the General Election Commission (GEC), indicated heavy

turnout in line with previous elections (typically 70-80%), but late-afternoon rains in some parts of the country may have dampened overall turnout. Swollen rivers and muddy terrain from earlier rains had been expected to keep some voters from voting. Some 356 candidates, competed in 26 districts (20 in the provinces and six in Ulaanbaatar) for 76 seats in Parliament. Unlike the 2004 Parliamentary elections, in which each voter selected a single candidate, this year's elections involved multi-member constituencies, voters could pick two, three or four candidates (depending on the population of their district).

VOTING WENT SMOOTHLY; ONE MINOR SCUFFLE REPORTED

13. (SBU) According to information from Embassy UB's 23 credentialed election observers (deployed within the capital and to the provinces of Khovd, Bulgan, Orkhon, Arhangai and Tov), voting in most areas went smoothly. This was echoed by some of the 17 observers affiliated with The Asia Foundation (TAF), and others deployed by the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership (APDP). With the exception of one minor altercation in UB between a supporter of the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) and a supporter of the opposition Democratic Party (DP), there were no reports of election-related violence.

PROCESSING TRANSPARENT AND IN LINE WITH ELECTION LAW

14. (SBU) Observers reported that at a vast majority of polling stations, processing was orderly, transparent and in accordance with the Election Law; that the rights of partisan election monitors were respected; and that election authorities were generally cooperative, flexible and effective. The police presence was low-key, described by one observer as "unobtrusive." An American observer who had witnessed at least three Parliamentary elections in Mongolia said international observers were better treated in these elections than in previous ones. Voter lists at polling stations visited by Post's observers ranged from more than 4,000 voters at certain UB stations, to as few as 416 voters at a polling station in a converted ger in the town of Nariingol ("Narrow River") in a remote area of far-western Khovd Province. (Note: Goats, cows and motorcycles outnumbered people; some of the latter traveled 40 km to vote, according to one of Post's observers. End Note.)

VOTE-BUYING ALLEGED, BUT EVIDENCE HAS YET TO SURFACE

15. (SBU) Post's election Command Center received several allegations of vote-buying, but none were supported by concrete evidence. The allegations started flying even before the start of balloting. In Tsetserleg, capital of the central province of Arkhangai, a DP member accused MPRP members of handing out cash on June 28. No evidence to support that accusation has emerged. However, in the same city, on the same day, Democrats said they had "followed and photographed little old ladies who were making their rounds and passing out MPRP cash." The DP said it immediately shared the photos with the General Election Commission; post has not seen the photos and cannot confirm their existence. Also on June 28, in the northern city of Darkhan, a member of the Civil Will Party (which, along with the New National Party, is currently a junior party in the three-party, MPRP-led coalition government) alleged that DP members were passing out cash and promising more later, after the payee's vote was "confirmed." No concrete evidence had emerged. In UB's Chingeltei District, a citizen filed a complaint alleging that DP buses were used to transport voters to polling stations, and that en route, bribes were being offered in exchange for votes for DP candidates. A DP district election official reported a

similar claim made against the MPRP. No evidence to support these allegations has emerged. Vote-buying with rice was alleged by individuals in UBQs densely populated and low-income Bayanzurkh District (where other unsubstantiated irregularities were also suspected). In UBQs Bayangol District, an election commissioner informed one of our observers that an aide to MPRP candidate Bolormaa was trying to bribe voters; no evidence was provided.

NEW ID CARDS REPORTEDLY ISSUED IN SOME LOCATIONS

¶6. (SBU) In a village outside the northern mining city of Erdenet, in the tiny province of Orkhon, DP and Civil Will party monitors informed election observers that a village chief (most are MPRP members) had distributed around 100 new national ID cards to local residents, many of whom are soldiers (based at a nearby military training camp). The matter was reported to election authorities.

In UBQs elite Sukhbaatar District, the nominal voting residence of the President, Speaker and Prime Minister (and visited by the Ambassador in two of his four stops at polling stations), Mongolian national television reported that the District Governor and three "social workers" reportedly distributed at least 60 new national ID cards to local residents. Election authorities are understood to have referred the case to police.

ELDERLY WOMEN SAID TO CAMPAIGN IN FRONT OF POLLING STATIONS

¶7. (SBU) In Tsetserleg, as well as in UBQs gritty Songinokhairkhan District observers saw an elderly woman standing outside a polling station encouraging inbound voters to support the MPRP. The woman was asked to leave. In the same district, a group of elderly women were reportedly standing outside a polling station, drumming up support for the MPRP (in contravention of the Election Law, which required all forms of campaigning cease at mid-night on June 27). They too were asked to leave.

VARIOUS ELECTION-RELATED DISPUTES

¶8. (SBU) Other election-related disputes involved the following:

-- In the UBQs Songinokhairkhan District, more than 200 voters were reportedly deemed ineligible to vote because of discrepancies on their two key forms of ID: their national ID card and their voter card. Later in the day, however, GEC Chairman Battulga made clear that the individuals in question should be allowed to vote. It was not clear whether their quest to vote was, in the end, successful. (Note: The difference in information on the two cards related to a community's name change; the voters' older national ID cards identified their home area by one name -- e.g., Formosa -- while their voter cards identified it by another -- e.g. Taiwan. End Note.)

-- At a polling stations in the city of Baganuur, in central Tov province, voting booths were set up in front of a bank of mirrors, possibly enabling people to see how voters were marking their ballot. In UBQs Bayanzurkh District, an observer found that partisan election monitors were seated directly behind voting booths, violating the right to privacy.

-- Also in Bayanzurkh district, a British election observer allegedly saw a stack of unused voter cards. Outside the same polling station, her Mongolian translator allegedly overheard a man telling someone over a cell phone, "It's not too busy now; you should bring over more people."

-- During one of at least three news conferences by GEC leaders carried live on TV on Election Day, GEC Secretary General Bayarsaikhan said there had been a "lot of movement" of voters from UB to Darkhan. This was seen by some Mongolian viewers as a reference to the illegal movement of voters.

-- At UBQs southwestern Khan-Uul district, an Embassy observer saw a car lurking by the back door of a polling station not long after the start of voting. When the observer approached, the car sped off quickly; it was unclear why.

WHAT NOW?

19. (SBU) In the biggest and most hotly-contested districts, vote-counting could take days, and runoffs could complicate the process (ref A). Post will report front-channel on election results, when they are available.

MINTON